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The Job Of The Harambee Afrikan Cultural Organization

The Harambee Afrikan Cultural Organization has been in existence for a little more than a decade. We have viewed, and continue to view, our primary job as that of transforming prisoners here who are of African ancestry from "black"/"negro" males to African men. It is our belief that success in this effort will mean that African men will leave this prison with a kind of consciousness and value system such that they will provide constructive and potent leadership to and for the communities on the outside to which they will be returning. We work to bring about this transformation in our members with the knowledge that we are fighting a very up-hill battle.

We meet four times per month and have meetings that run for two hours, with generally forty-five minutes to an hour of that time set aside for educational programs. These educational programs, which are the main focus of our meetings, address issues of pan-African history, African cultural ideas, important political and economic developments of relevance to the lives and aspirations of African people, etc. Sometimes we present these educational programs ourselves and sometimes Brothers and Sisters from outside the prison present the programs. We attempt, through these programs, to encourage our members to think critically, to instill in them a positive sense of self, to cultivate in them an Afrocentric value system. We attempt to do these things.

But our attempts are counteracted by several forces: other prisoners, our members' families and friends outside the prison, television, radio, magazines, and so forth. All these forces, in varying degrees, promote ideas and values that are often in stark opposition to those which we promote. We try to convince our members that they have worth on their own, that they have inner valvue. But television programs and magazines,

as well as much of the "music" that hits the radio airwaves, all combine to bombard our members with the idea that they do not have value, that what provides them with value is any number of types and styles of faddish clothes, expensive automobiles, and various other material goodies..

We introduce our members to the fact that they are Africans and should have appreciation for and take pride in the long and rich history of African people. But when they leave our meetings and go out onto the yard, they are confronted with other African prisoners who who think it is hip to think of themselves and each other as "niggers." Our members visit with their family members in the visiting room or over the telephone and attempt to share with them information and insights of an Afrocentric nature and find themselves not taken seriously, if not outright ridiculed. We attempt to cultivate in our members a respect for African women. But all around them, African prisoners and African partners they communicate with otherwise are promoting to them the idea that our Sisters are "bitches" and "hos,"

But what is a prison afterall if it is not, among other things, a reflection of trends, attitudes, and developments on the outside? And when those African men we've tried to bring to consciousness of their African selves leave this place, they return to communities that are no more nurturing of an African consciousness and its values than were their circles of friends and associates in here. Thus the little bit of foundation we've given these Brothers is quickly eroded. They return to this place. This is the reality we must deal with.

Obviously, we must work harder, must try to be more effective. But we can't do it all. In Omaha and elsewhere throughout the U.S., African communities must establish institutions, formal and/or informal, to receive African men and women released from prisons and provide them with ongoing

cultural nurturing as well as guidance and help in the material matters of every-day living. It is one hell of a feeling for one to sense that he or she is some kind of social/cultural freak, a veritable sore thumb; which is precisely what a released African prisoner, who has at least a rudimentary Afrocentric philosophical foundation, must sense. How is he or she to be expected to steadfastly promote unity while folks around him are promoting an individualistic I'll-get-mine attitude? How is he or she to be expected to live simply and not get hung up on British Knights running shoes, gold neck ropes, and so forth when people all around him are exhibiting a clear willingness to kill or die for such things?

Related to all this is the matter of learning; more specifically, how willing an African prisoner is to read materials in order to learn and to gain insights? While much is made of the high rate of illiteracy and functional illiteracy inside prisons, most of the African men who join the Harambee Afrikan Cultural Organization read fairly well. Nevertheless, the books in the green cabinet which serves as our library are rarely checked out; periodicals which we place on a table at each meeting are picked up by relatively few of our members and actually read by even fewer. It is as if some of our members are allergic to reading, at least when that reading has other than just a purely entertainment value.

To what do we attribute this tendency? In some cases, laziness may certainly be the cause. But we believe that something else is responsible, a matter of association. Having had at least 10 years formal indoctrination (so-called "education") in which thinking was not encouraged and in which little or nothing was taught about African people (at least, not in a positive vein), an African man or woman, in prison or otherwise, may associate learning/reading to learn with his or her experi-

ence with school.

For many children and youth, school is a boring experience in which original or innovative thinking is, not only not cultivated in students, but is often actively discouraged. The public school system does not educate. Rather, it is a system in which teachers, characteristically, just feed information and misinformation to students and press the students to be able to periodically throw it back up at them at quiz and test times. Oftentimes, the information and misinformation seem to students to have little relevance to their lives. Thus, the learning process, in the typical school setting, instead of being stimulating and challenging, tends to turn many students off to school and to learning itself.

If the American public school system is something less than invigorating for students in general, it is something much less for African and other students of color. African children and youth not only must be subjected to those public-school characteristics as described above but must also face situations in which they look into a mirror of learning and do not see themselves reflected back. In history, literature, etc., these African students see few or no people who look like themselves. And so they frequently come to feel themselves alienated from learning.

African men in prison are characteristically those who either have not finished highschool or, having finished highschool, did not do well academically. Harambee Afrikan Cultural Organization members, then, like other African prisoners, often need to be reintroduced to the process of learning. When this matter is added to the existence of forces which work to dilute or destroy what we attempt to instill in our members, it is easy to see that our job is hard. But it is a job that must be done--in here and out there. Our situation demands it.

FLAME Editorial Policy

The HARAMBEE FLAME, the monthly publication of the Harambee Afrikan Cultural Organization(parent chapter of the Harambee Afrikan Cultural Organization, Inc.) is a pan-Africanist newsletter. The FLAME's priority, with respect to news and views, is African people, events and developments which affect us and are, or should be, of concern to us. The FLAME does not recognize any distinction between African people based solely on place of birth. References in the FLAME to African people are made on the basis of our our common ancestry. An exception to this is the reprinting of articles, or excerpts thereof, from other publications, in which cases we do not alter "black" or other terms used to designate African people. This is our practice because we do not wish to diminish the integrity and authenticity of the articles we excerpt from.

Articles contained in the FLAME do not necessarily represent the official positions of the Harambee Afrikan Cultural Organization unless they are accompanied by a statement identifying the views as being those of the organization. Generally speaking, all unsigned articles are by the editor, Mopashitwe Mondo Eyen we Langa(aka David Rice).

We encourage you to submit articles to the FLAME. Please enclose with your submission a stamped, self-addressed envelope. Articles should not exceed 900 words, though longer pieces will not be automatically rejected. Short stories are subject to the same restriction with respect to length. We also welcome poetry and graphics. We are looking for poems which address African folks' lives, the conditions we face, and our struggles to rise above those things which hinder us. We are <u>not</u> looking for poems which sacrifice power and beauty for the sake of uniform rhythm and/or rhyme. Send submissions to to the editor c/o HARAMBEE FLAME.

From Other Sources

African Groups In U.S. Form To Save Youth

"Black children are bearing the brunt of the declining fortunes of African-Americans. They are overrepresented on every list of victimization: from fetal malnutrition to fatal addictions, from functional illiteracy to unwanted pregnancy, and many points in between...nearly one-half of African-American children under the age of 18 are living in poverty.

"...Sharp cuts in financial aid and skyrocketing tuition have pushed higher education further out of reach for young black students. College enrollment among African-Americans, particularly males, is way down from a decade past. Meanwhile there are more young black males incarcerated now that at any other time in history...

"The good news is that African-Americans are finding some success through solutions of their own design. Traditional institutions, like the black church, are joining forces with more contemporary fraternal and professional groups to mount a counterattack on the forces assailing the African-American future...

"For example, Project SPIRIT, a pilot tutorial program sponsored by the Congress of National Black Churches(CNBC), has markedly improved the academic skills of the children in the three cities it serves. But the emphasis isn't exclusively on academics, according to CNBC's executive director, Rev. Michael Lemmons. 'Project SPIRIT also makes sure students are well informed about their cultural heritage'. The after-school sessions conducted in 15 affiliated churches in Oakland, Calif., Indianapolis and Atlanta have have been so successful, says project director Vanella Crawford, that

similar programs are being planned for several other cities...

"Several black churches in the Southeast have adopted a program for adolescent males developed by University of Virginia social science professor Courtland Lee. Called 'Black Manhood Training: Body, Mind and Soul', the program was designed initially for use by guidance couselors in the predominantly black Durham, N.C. public school system...

"Others seek a more secular route to reaching youth...

"(Hannibal Afrik, a Chicago leader of the Simba movement)Afrik and his cultural nationalist counterparts in Brooklyn, Cleveland, Detroit and Los Angeles credit African inspiration for their big brother-cum-manhood initiation training program called 'Simba'--Kiswahili for 'lion!. The program emphasizes the youths' responsibility to their families and communities..."

-Above passages excerpted from "Local Efforts Growing To Save The Children," which appears on page 6 of the May 17-23 IN THESE TIMES(Chicago, ILL).

Students Seeking Pan-African Studies Arrested

"Less than a month after Morris Brown College students won their demands for pan-African studies and improved living conditions in the dormitories the administration has ordered the arrest of the protest leaders, including the student government president Derrick Boazman. Student leaders of the three other colleges--Clark, Spellman and Morehouse--that make up the Atlanta University Center complex, all of whom supported the protest action of the Morris Brown students, were also arrested at a meeting on Monday, May 1.

"...The students had been meeting regularly over the past few weeks to promote unity among the four Black colleges, all of which are located within blocks of each other.

"The struggle between the administration and the students at Morris Brown...is not limited to this university, according to alumnus Tony Muhammad... 'There is a resurgence of Black power at Black universities and the students are demanding that their history be taught and that they have the right to have speakers of their choice come to the campus...And this has caused confrontations with the administration'. The administration barred Farrakhan from speaking at Morris Brown last July during the Democratic Party convention.

"Around the country the controversial Nation of Islam leader is more welcome as a speaker at some white universities are often faced with such intense financial pressure that they fear to offend the white liberal funding sources on which they depend..."

-Above passages excerpted from "27 Students Arrested At Atlanta's Morris Brown College," which appears on page 2 of the May 18 THE NATIONAL ALLIANCE(N.Y., N.Y.)

Evolution Of Racism In U.S.

"In the last half century, racism in the U.S. has evolved through three stages--from individual to institutional, and more recently, to 'respectable' racism. Individual racism refers to overt acts of violence against blacks by individual whites, such as the bombing of a black church. Institutional racism, in the form of public policies and social arrangements which contribute to the lack of adequate food, shelter, medical and educational facilities for blacks, continues unabated.

Institutional racism is dangerous because it in-

volves policies which appear to be neutral in their intent, but which have a decidedly discriminatory impact. For example, at-large voting districts dilute the black vote. The inequitable system of financing public schools from the local property tax means that blacks who live in inner cities often are relegated to an inferior education, and zoning regulations deny blacks access to quality housing in suburban America.

"In the past 20 years, individual racism and institutional racism have been supplemented by 'respectable' racism, in which white leaders take the position that racial discrimination has ended, as evidenced by alleged enormous black political, economic and social progress. Today's respectable racism is particularly pernicious. By not speaking out against the overt and institutional racism in the U.S., the white political leadership contributes to its perpetuation, if not its legitimization.

"As a result, racial incidents against blacks, dramatized by the Howard Beach killing in New York, have increased an estimated 400 percent since Reagan took office in 1981. Respectable racism attempts to deprive blacks of the validity of their grievances, thereby making black demands appear to be outrageous. Thus, the blame for the lack of adequate black economic mobility shifts from white racism to the fault of individual blacks. In this manner, respectable racism provides the ultimate absolution of the white community for the condition of black Americans...

-Above passages excerpted from "Racial Politics In The 1988 Presidential Election," which appears on pages 30-36 of the Vol. 20, No. 1 THE BLACK SCHOLAR(Oakland, CA)

Efforts At Uniting Liberated Areas In Zaire

"During the 25 years that Mobutu has run the Congo /Zaire, the living standard of the Congolese people has fallen to 25% of its pre-Mobutu level. Today the people of the Congo are generally considered to be the poorest in the world. Half the children in the Congo die before the age of two, while not a single hospital has been built under Mobutu's reign...

"In the last two years, the Workers and Peasants Party has begun the protracted process of uniting the various liberated areas and now controls 7% to 10% of the countryside.

"'We are beginning the process of building a new life in the liberated areas', reports a POP (Workers and Peasants Party of the Congo) spokesperson. The rebuilding process involves collectivizing the land and means of production in order to provide for the basic needs of the people in a land where almost no one has enough. The POP is building schools and health clinics with particular emphasis on teaching nutrition and prenatal care.

"The People's Armed Forces--the liberation army led by the POP--not only fights Mobutu's US and European-supplied military but works in the fields alongside the peasants, workers and revolutionary intellectuals and constructs homes, schools and clinics..."

-Above passages excerpted from "Mobutu Says Rep. Gus Savage Is On His Side," which appears on page 3 of the May 18 THE NATIONAL ALLIANCE(N.Y., N.Y.).

Right-Wing Anti-Sanctions Tricks

"Lobbying around the issue of further sanctions

against South Africa has been intense. The right wing has mobilized its forces to convince Congress that sanctions do not work, that sanctions are the principle causeeof black suffering, or that the real threat in southern Africa is not apartheid, but communism. The WALL STREET JOURNAL reported that U.S. companies in South Africa have set up a lobbying 'war chest', with each company contributing $5,000 to hire lobbyists. Congressional staffers report that South African agents have stepped up their lobbying efforts to convince them to block further sanctions against the apartheid regime. Clearly conceptualized video tapes, featuring a black American named J. Morgan Hodges, and condemning the sanctions legislation, have been circulated to Congressional offices.

"The right wing is resorting to outright lies in some of its lobbying efforts against the sanctions bill. For instance, a group called 'Operation Heartbreak' asked a black elementary school in Washington, D.C. if it would be interested in sending its children to Congressional offices to express concern about the plight of children in South Africa. The school, which supports the liberation of South Africa, agreed. The children went to Capitol Hill, delivering black dolls symbolic of the children of South Africa, and passing

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out 'Operation Heartbreak' literature. A photograph of one of the students was prominently displayed in the conservative WASHINGTON TIMES, with a caption indicating that she was part of an anti-sanctions effort. It was only after the children had been used that the school discovered that 'Operation Heartbreak' is actually an anti-sanctions, right-wing organization..."

-Passages on previousspage excerpted from "The Right Wing Mobilizes To Fight Sanctions," which appears on page 3 of the Summer '88 WASHINGTON NOTES ON AFRICA(Washington, D.C.).

African-American Summit Document Lists Concerns

(The African-American Summit held in New Orleans April 21-23)"The summit document lists several areas of concern the delegates planned to take back to their home regions for consideration. Among those issues are the following: -Strengthening the African-American family. -Housing. Calls for a vastly increased level of federal assistance dominate this category. Residential management and ownership is boosted. -Education. The focus here is on increased federal assistance for education. Standardized testing is assailed, and larger teacher salaries are advocated. The document also calls for a significant increase in the federal commitment to historically black colleges. -Employment. Again, the focus is on increased governmental commitment. Economic empowerment. The document urges support for all African-American economic development projects, including such programs as the Black United Front's 'buy black' campaign and the Nation of Islam's 'power' program. It calls for the establishment of many African-American joint ventures to maximize capital formation for investment purposes. -Political empowerment. Not much here, except for a call for African-American elected officials to become more accountable to their constituents. -Global commitment. The focus here is on the African-American connunities' interest in foreign policy toward Africa. Perhaps the most noteworthy item in this category is the warning that the cooling East-West struggle could be transformed into an East-West alliance that would then pressure Third-World states. -Drugs and criminal justice. This category employs the most ominous language. African-Americans are 'under siege', the document

sstates. 'Drugs, drug perpetrators and drug violence are killing African-Americans by the thousands. The nightmare must end'. The document urges the U.S. to attack drug profiteers on the national and international scene, but to be careful in protecting civil rights as it fights the drug war at home. It calls for the establishment of additional drug prevention and treatment programs and 'strong individual and community sanctions against particpating in the drug trade'. -Legislative agenda. The most noteworthy aspect of this plank is the proposal that a course in racial relations be taught as a mandated subject for students of all races in both secondary and postsecondary education..."

-Above passages excerpted from "The Black Summit Tackles Some Of The Big Uneasies," which Appears on pages 7 and 10 of the May 3-9 IN THESE TIMES(Chicago, ILL).

The Death Penalty: Racism & Wrongful Deaths

"...Rose-Avila(Magdaleno Rose-Avila, the director of Amnesty International's death penalty project) says that of the 580 men hanged for rape in modern times, 525 of them were blacks who raped white women. Yet although sexual exploitation of black females has long been an open social secret--African-Americans' varied skin shades provides vivid proof of past interracial couplings--never has a white man been executed for raping a black woman.

"Also, according to a 1983 study conducted by University of Iowa sociology professor David Baldus, a killer of a white victim in Georgia was 4.3 times more likely to receive the death penalty t than the killer of a Black victim...

"A 1987 study by Radelet and Tufts University philosophy professor Hugo Bedau documents 350 cases in which innocent people were convicted of capital

crimes--23 of whom were eventually executed...

"'We found that of all the decades in this century, the '70s ranked second in the number of errors', he said. 'Indeed, we now know of approximately 30 men who were sentenced to death after 1972 who have been released from death row after the state itself admitted error'..."

-Above passages excerpted from "The Death Penalty And The Illusion Of Justice," which appears on page 6 of the May 24-June 6 IN THESE TIMES(Chicago, ILL).

Morocco And Polisario Front Exchange Peace Gestures

"Morocco's King Hassan has granted amnesty to over 200 political prisoners...The Polisario Front, which has been fighting Morocco's occupation of the Western Sahara since 1975, has meanwhile made a dramatic gesture aimed at spurring peace talks. Saharan Arab Democratic Republic Prime Minister Mahmoud Ali Beiba announced last week that Polisario will soon release 200 Moroccan prisoners. Beiba said the release was a goodwill move designed to bring King Hassan back to the negotiating table..."

-Above passages excerpted from "Detainees, War Prisoners Freed--Still No Talks," which appears on page 16 of the May 24 THE GUARDIAN (N.Y.,N.Y.).

Back In Time

"The Aryans(Indo-European barbarian-nomads kin to the Hyksos Shephard Kings and Hittites who conquered Egypt and Mesopotamia) in the second millenium B.C. invaded India, but were unsuccessful in defeating altogether the Black Dravidians-Harrapa civilization militarily so they conquered it by poetry.

"Specifically, a tribe of Aryan priest-poets called the Bharatas who were responsible for conducting Aryan religious services and sacrifices, infiltrated the Dravidian Hindu religion and manipulated the black and white symbolism into poems espousing their cause and which showed their god Indra - a white skinned blonde haired blue eyed sky god - as victorious over the indigenous black people whom they designated as demon 'dasas'(slaves).

"This they fostered upon the people of Northern India whom they subjugated. This was accompanied by a caste system called varna - meaning color - in which Brahman, a pure Aryan, constituted the head of society, its priests and warriors, while the Sudras(Blacks) were the feet, the untouchables or slaves of society.

"So the poetry of the Vedas, Hindu sacred poems, called Blacks 'children of darkness' or evil and depicted a white god defeating them: 'Indra who made subject the dasa color; to him goes the morning juice active and bright like bulls driving the black skin far away, quelling the Dasas upon the bridge of bliss, leaving the bridge of woe far behind.'..."

Source: "The Poet As A Creator Of Social Values" by Sonia Sanchez, which appears in the January/February 1985 edition of THE BLACK SCHOLAR

Announcements

The National Blues Amateur Talent Contest is open to all Blues Music Performers who individually do not earn a living wage performing Blues Music. A Blues Amateur Act is an individual performing as a soloist or several individuals performing together as a musical group, who, individually or as a group are not signed to a recording, and/or personal management, and/or exclusive booking contract; and who individually or as a musical group do not have a commercial recording in national distribution. Contest application forms can be obtained by writing the N.B.C.A. at 352 Beale Street, Memphis, TN 38103. Talent wishing to compete must re return completed application forms by August 1, 1989. Applications received after the August 1 deadline will not be honored.

CAN'T JAIL THE SPIRIT, a recently published book which contains biographies of 65 political prisoners in the U.S., is available from: Committee To End The Marion Lockdown; 343 So. Dearborn, Suite 1607; Chicago, ILL 60604.

THE ISIS PAPERS: THE KEYS TO THE COLORS by Dr. Frances Cress Welsing is, according to the Third World Press 1989 Catalog, now available. "This book of essays focuses on Dr. Cress-Welsing's theories of White world supremacy and the difficulties and casualties African Americans experience while trying to survive in a system dominated by European Americans...Dr. Cress-Welsing probes the symbol structure of the white supremacy system to reveal the psychological dynamics of racism." THE ISIS PAPERS is available from: Third World Press; P.O. Box 730; 7524 S. Cottage Grove Ave.; Chicago, ILL 60619. We just double-checked. It's not available yet. Inquire.

The Harambee Afrikan Cultural Organization hopes to publish AFRICAN POETS IN NEBRASKA, Vol. 3 this summer. Submit your work right away.